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# Roger Williams University Remembers President Donald J. Farish

Farish, who died July 5, became president of RWU in 2011 with a focus to “build the university the world needs now”



President Donald J. Farish

July 5, 2018 | Public Affairs

*Updated at 2:12 p.m. Friday, July 6, with reflections from Rhode Island's top elected officials and a photo gallery celebrating President Farish.*

**BRISTOL, R.I.** – Roger Williams University President Donald J. Farish, who transformed RWU into a vital institution devoted to community engagement, college affordability and equity, died on Thursday, July 5, at Tufts Medical Center, in Boston, after a sudden and serious illness. He was 75.

Farish, who became RWU’s 10th president in 2011, was planning to retire when his current contract expired in June 2019, culminating a remarkable 51-year career in academia.

During his seven years at RWU, he provided a vision for a modern university, aiming to “build the university the world needs now” and strongly positioning the university for its next phase of institutional growth. Throughout his tenure, he demonstrated a genuine love for students and a steadfast belief in the power of higher education to transform lives. He was a thought leader and a prolific writer, who used his presidential blog and essays to advocate for change in the U.S. model of higher education.

“Don Farish capped a distinguished career of service in higher education with his transformative presidency at Roger Williams University,” RWU Board of Trustees Chairman Richard L. Bready said. “His strong sense of ethics, vision and steady leadership have improved the University in virtually every respect and heightened its national reputation.”

“Don Farish will be honored beyond the campus for his clear-eyed understanding of the challenges faced by higher education and his bold proposals to meet them,” RWU Provost Andrew Workman said. “At the University, he will be remembered for his eloquence, intelligence, wit and for his deep concern for our students.”

“Don Farish was an extraordinary leader for Roger Williams University,” RWU Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration Jerome Williams said. “He not only had great vision for the University but great vision for higher education in general. His efforts to expand experiential learning while freezing tuition for our students was innovative and moved the University forward. He did this with exceptional leadership, transparency and a respect for everyone. He will be greatly missed.”



"I am deeply saddened by the passing of President Farish," U.S. Sen. Jack Reed said. "He was truly a scholar and a gentlemen who touched the lives of countless students, faculty and members of the Roger Williams community. His dedication to discovery, learning and service to others will be deeply missed."

"Rhode Island lost a wonderful, wise champion for higher education with President Don Farish’s passing," U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse said. "President Farish embodied the ideals that Roger Williams set forth for Rhode Island, and Roger Williams University thrived under his thoughtful leadership. My heart goes out to Dr. Farish’s family and the countless members of the Roger Williams University community whose lives he changed for the better."

U.S. Rep. David N. Cicilline said, "Since President Farish took over in 2011, Roger Williams University has grown by leaps and bounds. He literally redefined the ideals for which this institution stands when he articulated a new visionary goal: ‘To build the university the world needs now.’ "

U.S. Rep. James R. Langevin said, "My thoughts are with the friends and family of President Farish and the entire Roger Williams University community during this difficult time. His remarkable contributions to the University and higher education will never be forgotten."

Rhode Island Gov. Gina M. Raimondo said, "I'm incredibly saddened by this news. President Farish's contributions to Roger Williams University—and our whole state — will not be forgotten. Andy and I are thinking of his family, friends and the RWU community during this time."

Providence Mayor Jorge O. Elorza, a former RWU Law professor, said he was "deeply saddened by the passing of my good friend, RWU President Donald Farish. As a leader in academia and community champion, his passionate work to uplift lives led to fruitful partnerships that opened doors for students and Providence communities. President Farish will be missed as an invaluable partner to the city, and we will cherish the legacy that he has left behind."

## Celebrating President Farish



President Farish and Swoop (RWU's mascot) at the annual employee appreciation barbecue.



### President Farish's legacy

Among the many accomplishments during President Farish’s tenure:



In fall 2014, the RWU community launched [The Vision Project](#), with more than 20 committees of faculty, staff, students and trustees working together over six months to articulate a bold, new core purpose: “To strengthen society through engaged teaching and learning.” They also established a set of core values and a visionary goal: “To build the university the world needs now.”

Working with RWU faculty and local organizations, the [Community Partnerships Center](#) has involved 2,811 students in a total of 259 community-engaged projects over the last seven years. These programs provide lasting benefits to our community partners and are aligned with academic programs to provide experiential learning opportunities for students.

Since 2012, each incoming undergraduate class has received a tuition guarantee for the duration of their four-year full-time studies as part of the [Affordable Excellence](#) program, providing peace of mind for students and parents who know exactly what their tuition will be and can plan accordingly. In 2014, RWU expanded the tuition guarantee and lowered the tuition rate to the School of Law.

One year ago, RWU hired its first-ever Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Ame O. Lambert, and the University is expanding its efforts to welcome and value all expressions of diversity and identity. In January 2018, more than 300 RWU students, faculty, staff and community members gathered for “[Thriving RWU 2030: A Summit on Diversity and Inclusion](#),” producing valuable insights and proposals.

In 2016, RWU doubled the size of its presence in downtown Providence, and the new campus at One Empire Plaza has become a hub of innovation and new initiatives. For example, the [RWU School of Continuing Studies](#) is partnering with the first Gateway to College National Network program in Rhode Island, offering students who have left high school before graduation a chance to earn a high school diploma and college credit. And groups such as the Latino Policy Institute at RWU and HousingWorksRI are making a difference on important policy matters.

At the same time, President Farish emerged as a national voice for reform in higher education, launching a blog called “[Higher Ed in Crisis: A President’s Take](#).” His [essays](#) appeared in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Inside Higher Ed and The Hechinger Report. And just this year, he wrote an eight-part blog series titled “Can Higher Education Solve America’s Economic Crisis?”

Farish was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, in December 1942 and moved to Vancouver at age 16. He won a scholarship through a national competition to become the first member of his family to attend college. He earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of British Columbia in 1963, majoring in zoology, and a master’s degree from North Carolina State University in 1966, majoring in entomology.

Farish earned a doctorate from Harvard University in 1970, majoring in biology, with the renowned biologist E.O. Wilson as his Ph.D. adviser. He earned a law degree from the University of Missouri in 1976, and he completed studies at Harvard University’s Institute for Educational Management in 1992.

Farish taught at the University of Missouri from 1968 to 1979, becoming chair of the Physiology and Behavior Section of the Division of Biological Sciences. He served as an assistant dean and an associate dean at the University of Rhode Island’s College of Arts and Sciences from 1979 to 1983. He worked at Sonoma State University from 1983 to 1998, rising to Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs after serving as dean of the School of Natural Sciences.

In 1998, Farish became the sixth president of Rowan University, a public research university in Glassboro, N.J. During 13 years at Rowan, he oversaw the physical expansion of the campus, including the construction of new academic facilities for science, medicine, teacher education and technology research; nearly 2,000 additional student residence beds to accommodate rapidly expanding enrollment; and a 26-acre downtown redevelopment project to connect the borough of Glassboro with the university.

Farish is survived by his beloved wife, Maia; his younger sister Pamela Walton and her husband Neil of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada; his stepson Michael Gaillard and his wife, Brett, and their two sons, Sam and Max, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; and several nieces and nephews. He was predeceased in 2010 by his younger brother, Bill, whose wife, Jan Farish, resides in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

More information about funeral services and campus memorial arrangements will be provided as it becomes available. For updated information, visit: [www.rwu.edu/remembering-president-farish](http://www.rwu.edu/remembering-president-farish).

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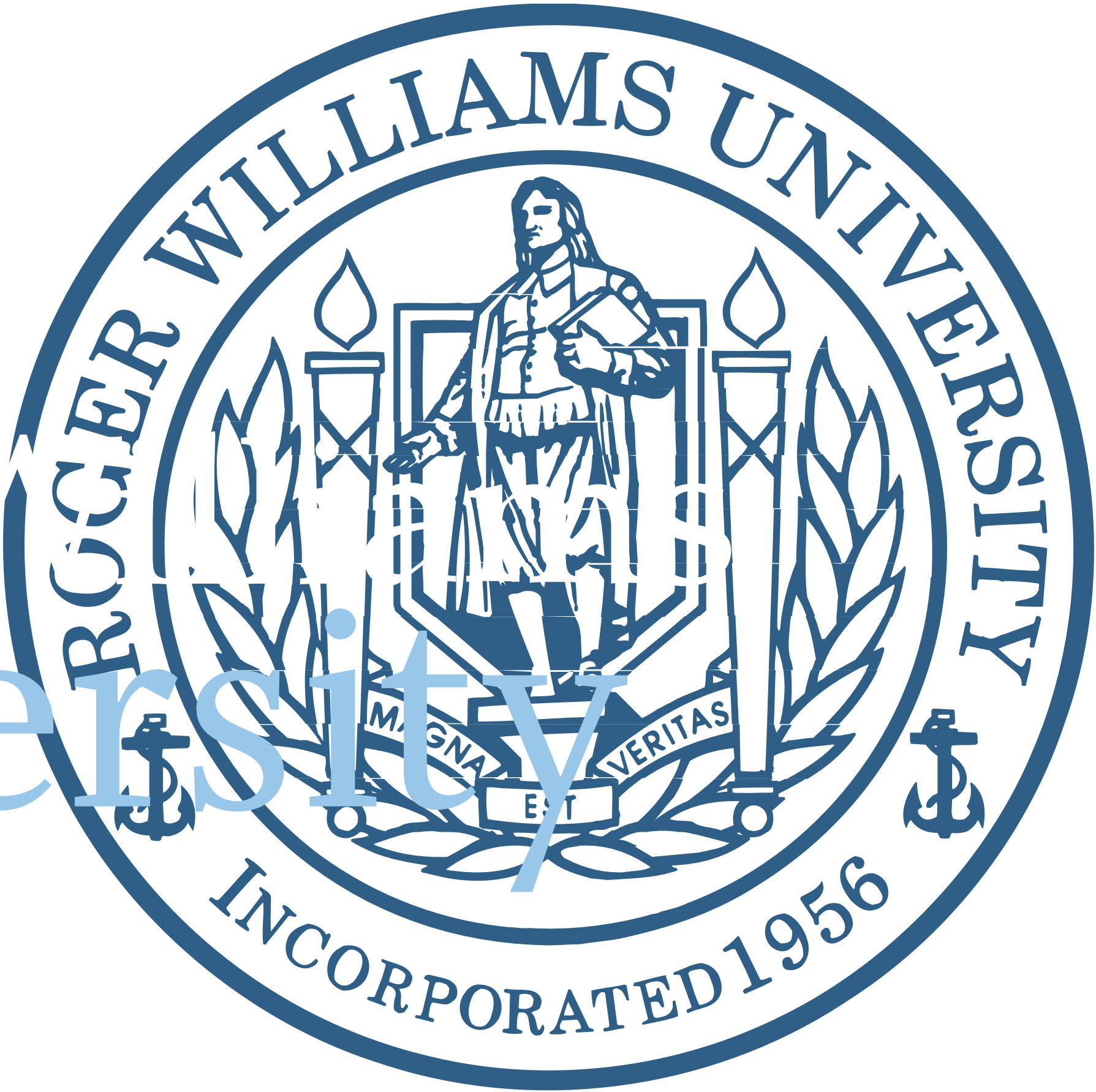


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